

The Gurnet - Part VIII

By HERBERT BOARDMAN

(Written in 1935)

1904. A new steamer functioned on the very popular excursion run to Plymouth, named the "Old Colony."

Mr. and Mrs. Boardman employed Mrs. Lizzie Folen as cook and it was a very busy season.

Three parties of little girls came down from Din-nison House, in Boston, under the direction of Miss Helen Gould Brown of Melrose (a relative of the famous Helen Gould) and Miss Bessie Hartshorne. Each of these parties remained a week. They were poor children from the South End, the vicinity of Tyler, Hudson and Curve streets. Many of them had never been away from the city slums and tenement districts and became wild with freedom when they arrived.

Miss Brown was kept busy, particularly as a very handsome and aristocratic young man from Newton, Mr. Oswin Bourdon, came along too. Between her romance and her less romantic work with the South End harum-scarums, every moment of her time was occupied. However, she found time to promenade with Mr. Bourdon in the moonlight. After he left I remember one of the girls asking if she wasn't lonesome without her "Feller."



Herbert Boardman, author of this series on The Gurnet, draws water as Phyllis Upham looks on.

I also remember having a dispute with one of these girls and it ended in her slapping my face.

A pleasant Coast Guard man that summer was Mr. Ryder of Chatham. I recently read of his suicide.

The Howes of Needham came down with a new member of their family, Harriet Howe, age 1. Another baby who was destined to be a well known resident of the Gurnet was William Matthew Jacobs, son of William and Florence [Hall] Jacobs.

The summer of 1904 proved to be Mr. Boardman's last summer at the Gurnet. For nearly 20 years he had been the most prominent summer resident, and his well known figure was seen constantly about the farm -- haying, gardening, milking cows, helping his wife and delivering milk. Although he was over 70 in 1904, he was energetic and active, and his wiry figure could be seen running through the fields and pastures as he went about his daily chores. He was proud of his farm and particularly of his cornfield, which extended from the rear of the farmhouse to the ocean some years. It was a veritable sea of green cornstalks where one could easily lose one's self.

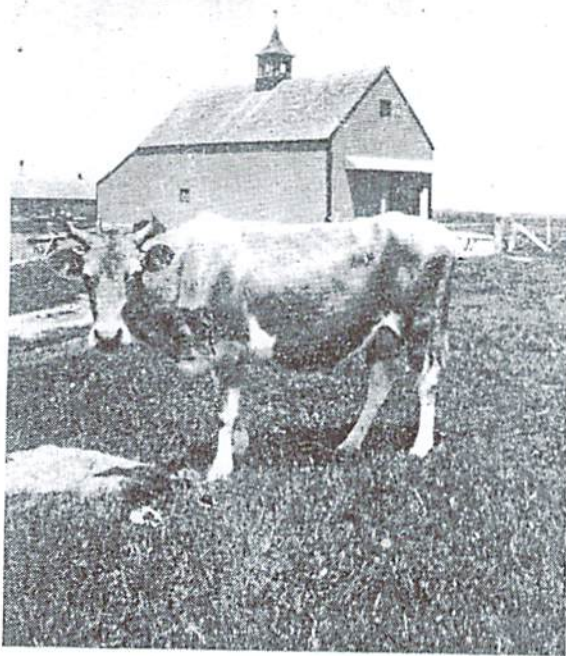
Joseph Boardman was a great story-teller and could keep a room full of people roaring with laughter with his mimicry and humorous anecdotes. He was devoted to children whom he habitually petted and talked to in a childish way which appealed to them. He was of a cheerful disposition, though nervous and impatient when things went wrong. He was not a drinking man -- neither did he smoke -- although he did like hard cider which he used to mix with an egg-nog. There were several barrels of cider of diverse vintages in the cellar of the inn.

In the summer of 1902, as he sat in the wagon ready to drive to Duxbury, somebody clamped an old stove-pipe hat, somewhat rakishly, on his head and ordered him to look pleasant. He braced up and exclaimed with great dignity, "I'm proprietor!" and one of the best pictures ever taken of him was snapped. In 1903, he made a few visits to the Inn owing to activities at his Raynham farm. But he did come to Duxbury when the National Guard encamped at Powder Point and on Governor's Day had a long talk with the Governor of Massachusetts John Bates. Henry Finney had bought a new beach wagon which was christened that day, a great improvement on the old turn-out.

In 1904, I accompanied my grandfather on many trips to Duxbury. As we drove through the streets of the picturesque town, nearly everybody would salute him as he was a well known figure there. One day in passing the drug store, he was amused at my hint for a drink, when I exclaimed, "If I had 5 cents, I would get a glass of soda!" Needless to say, I achieved my end.

Occasionally, he allowed me to drive to Duxbury, and one day I nearly overturned the wagon in endeavoring to turn around in front of Sweetser and

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Boardman and Upham watching hydroplane at the Gurnet in 1920.

Arnold's Store. Upon arriving at the Gurnet, while the wagon was being unloaded, he always irritated me by saying, "Come here and hold these horses -- they keep getting their heads down." I did not enjoy this task, as the horses were pestered by green-head flies and were impatient. I was never successful managing livestock. When a small boy, I tried driving the cows home at night for awhile, and all went well for awhile until one night they felt obstinate and refused my commands. I flew into a temper and shouted, "They're contrary -- just like a woman!" and threw my stick right in the direction of my aunt, Mrs. Finney, nearly hitting her on the head. I did, however, manage to feed the hens. The henyard was then located in the rear of the present Manson cottage. An old ship fo'castle ruin stood there against the wall.

In the summer of 1904, I often went with my grandfather to the old Ford Department Store in Duxbury built about 1800. This old store, in the more northerly section of the town above the railroad, was a curiosity -- a typical old-time American country store. I remember reading that this old landmark was burned. It was several yards long and, as one lady put

it, resembled a row of henhouses strung together. Here my grandfather used to sit on a box or barrel, eat crackers and cheese and drink root beer on hot summer afternoons while he amused the proprietor with his funny stories. Once he asked me what I intended to be when I grew up, I told him I had thought of doing something along musical or literary lines, and he told me, "Well, you want to get so that you can compute interest." -- an accomplishment I have never attained. We also used to visit at old Mrs. Chandler's home near the station. She was a jolly old lady, and we stopped there for apples. On the long ride home down the beach, grandfather would continue his stories.

Grandfather once asked my mother if she would not like to invest some money in buying Saquish. She answered with considerable acumen, "When I put my money into anything, it will be something the Atlantic Ocean won't wash away."

It was a common thing for Mr. Boardman to visit Boston markets and return with heavily loaded market baskets on each arm. I was with him on one such occasion, a rainy Saturday morning, and I remember him coming to an early train so heavily laden he could scarcely walk. He slept all the way, and I had to awaken him when we approached Duxbury. One night, he walked down the beach in a pouring rain and arrived thoroughly soaked, causing my grandmother much alarm.

He attended the Old Home Day celebration in his native town, Bridgewater, N.H., where he delivered an eloquent speech, as was his custom, on Aug. 25, 1904. On his return, I met him at the depot in Duxbury, and as we drove down the beach in the moonlight, he remarked, "In Bridgewater, I had to look up to see the sky; here, I can see it anywhere above the horizon." After his late supper, he leaned back in his chair and repeated the speech he had just delivered in his hometown. It was a fine speech; he had quite a gift for oratory which would have been developed had he followed the law profession as he wanted to. But, throughout his lifetime, he remained an expert farmer, although he carried on an extensive baking and restaurant business in Boston at various times.

1905. Two new houses were built at the Gurnet in 1905 -- one a portable house (now owned by Marcus Graham) built on the site of the present Jacobs house by our old friend Harry Dennie. The other cottage (now the Norton house) was remodeled from an old boat house on the shore and moved to its present site and occupied by Henry Finney and William Jacobs. This joint arrangement lasted 2 seasons after which it became the exclusive property of the Jacobs family.

The Boardmans rented the inn in 1905 to a coast guard man named Higgins, who ran the place all season.

On Aug. 13, 1905, Joseph Boardman passed away after a brief illness at his other farm in Raynham. He had only been in Plymouth once that summer and did

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not visit the Gurnet at all, so far as I know. After his death, Mrs. Boardman (my grandmother) and her daughter, Mrs. Finney, spent a few weeks at the new Finney-Jacobs cottage, but it was a sad visit for them. The only cheerful feature was Harry Dennie and his new establishment, which caused great fun for the Gurnet people. Though he no longer sang, he was fully as original and entertaining as he had been back in the '80s. One day, while concocting some dish with eggs, a mishap occurred, and he threw the eggs all over his house in a fit of temper. My aunt happened to call at the time and came running out exclaiming, "Look out! Eggs are flying everywhere!"

1906. Mrs. Boardman returned to the Inn for the summer of 1906, and this proved to be its last season as a boarding house. The hard work of running the house without the able aid of her husband was more than she cared to undertake again. It was a sad summer for her in her loneliness and grief.

The Finneys, of course, helped her, and Fayette Boardman with his wife and little daughter, Marjorie, were present all summer. Mrs. Boardman's brother, Augustus Follansbee, a feeble old man, with Lizzie Folen again as cook, completed the roster of the house management. I spent several weeks in installments there that year. My cousin, Miss Ella Murdock of Somerville, also spent her vacation at the Inn. Though she had not been at the Gurnet since 1888, when Harry Dennie blacked her up, she was able to recall this incident upon meeting Harry again.

One day, she saw Mrs. Alfred Barnes [the former Susan Dimond] crossing the field and said, "I remember seeing that woman when I was here years ago, and she looks exactly the same and is dressed just the same as when I saw her then." Indeed Mrs. Barnes was a veritable part of the Gurnet -- who, like the place, never changed much and was loved by all.

The Uphams came in August and brought their little daughter, Dorothy, age 1. I was then 14 years old and felt big in my first long pants.

The Boardman cow was a strange and sad animal, apparently lonely and homesick. She would hardly ever eat and would stand for hours gazing out to sea. Once she stood too near the edge and tumbled over.

However, once a day she changed her position and directed her wistful gaze toward Duxbury.

One rainy day, Ella Murdock and I took some magazines to the Pavilion for our amusement and my grandmother told me to keep an eye on the cow. I thought it hardly necessary, as she never had moved, and I could conceive of no reason why she should move on that particular day. Ella and I were greatly amused at Uncle Gus Follansbee and Fayette Boardman who were moving the old well house into the henyard for a henhouse. First, Fayette would walk slowly around the little house, followed solemnly by Uncle Gus. Though the house appeared to be advancing very slowly, the job was finally done. The cow had suddenly broken her sad reverie and bolted up the beach toward Duxbury. Uncle Fayette was delegated to pursue the unhappy creature. He ate his lunch, shaved, harnessed up the horse and started. He didn't think she had pep enough to travel far, but he cornered the runaway just as she was ambling into the fashionable Powder Point seciton.

Some of the small children present at this time were Austin Holmes, son of Fred Holmes and Flavel Payne, son of Arthur Payne.

H. Messinger Fisher, an architect and talented painter from Montclair, New Jersey -- son of an old Duxbury family -- spent the entire summer at the Inn and painted some excellent pictures. He also composed a hand-lettered booklet commemorating the events of the summer with pen and ink sketches. He expressed himself quite eloquently in this little artistic booklet and made several copies and gave them to interested persons.

One day, he conceived the idea of rowing Ella and myself to Plymouth. While we considered this a great lark, it is a wonder this feat did not finish him. As we were leaving the Plymouth Yacht Club on our return trip, Mrs. Dunham [Captain Roger's mother-in-law], a dear old lady with a keen sense of humor, called out to us in a droll manner, "I trust you'll get home before midnight." Thanks to Mr. Fisher's industry, we were home in good season. Another afternoon, Ella and I walked to Duxbury and back. Ella is now Frances Murdock-Lithgow, an actress.

In August 1906, Mr. Craig of Plymouth ran excursions to Provincetown in his tug-boat, the "Mary Arnold" and he said that if a certain signal was put up, he would take aboard any Gurnet passengers who would row out. Will Upham, Uncle Fayette, Father and I decided to go. The signal was put up and Henry Finney rowed us out in a dory. The tug arrived as per schedule and went right along leaving us in the dory wildly shouting and gesturing. However, the next day we tried again and had a fine sail across the bay to Provincetown.

(to be continued)